

CALIFORNIA DESERT CONSERVATION AND RECREATION ACT



U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein
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<http://feinstein.senate.gov>

**A BALANCED APPROACH TO
PROTECTING LAND AND MANAGING
CALIFORNIA'S DESERT RESOURCES**



Photos courtesy of:
David Lamfrom (cover)
Jack Thompson
California Wilderness Coalition
The Wildlands Conservancy
Bureau of Land Management
First Solar, Inc.
James Marvin Phelps
John Dittli



18,610 acres of land containing the Alabama Hills in Inyo County would be designated as a National Scenic Area if this legislation becomes law. The legislation would protect the area for recreational use by the public and for future generations.



Senator Feinstein's proposed legislation would designate 77 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers, including this part of Whitewater River near the San Bernardino National Forest.



Dear Californian,

When I think of the California desert, I think of magnificent landscapes and mountain vistas. I think of beautiful species like bighorn sheep, mule deer and desert tortoises. I think of unique vegetation like Joshua trees. And I think of the long history of local Native American tribes. The California desert is a true American treasure.

This is why I introduced the *California Desert Conservation and Recreation Act*, a bill to ensure the desert is protected for generations to come.

The California desert wasn't always like this. I remember driving down Route 66 in the 1960s and seeing old cars, mattresses, furniture and other discarded waste. People took the desert for granted and didn't appreciate that it was a living entity, replete with beautiful flora and fauna.

We've come a long way since then, in large part due to the *1994 California Desert Protection Act*. Today it's heartening to see a clean desert, thriving species and millions of tourists.

But we still have more work to do. This new bill is the next chapter in the effort to preserve this special land. It has been a long time in the making, the product of hundreds of hours of meetings over six years with a range of interested parties. I am very grateful to the many individuals and groups that came to the table in good faith seeking to find compromises. This bill is our attempt to achieve consensus. As you'll see in the following pages, the bill seeks to protect additional land while balancing the many uses of California's desert resources.

It is my deep hope that Congress passes this bill, as it is good for California and the country. I also hope my colleagues recognize the simple fact that desert conservation should not be a partisan issue. Over the years, legislators have come together across party lines to preserve the California desert and I am confident we can do so again.

It's not going to be easy and we need your help. I hope you will join us in the fight to protect this very special land.

Sincerely,

Senator Dianne Feinstein

BUILDING ON THE LEGACY OF 1994

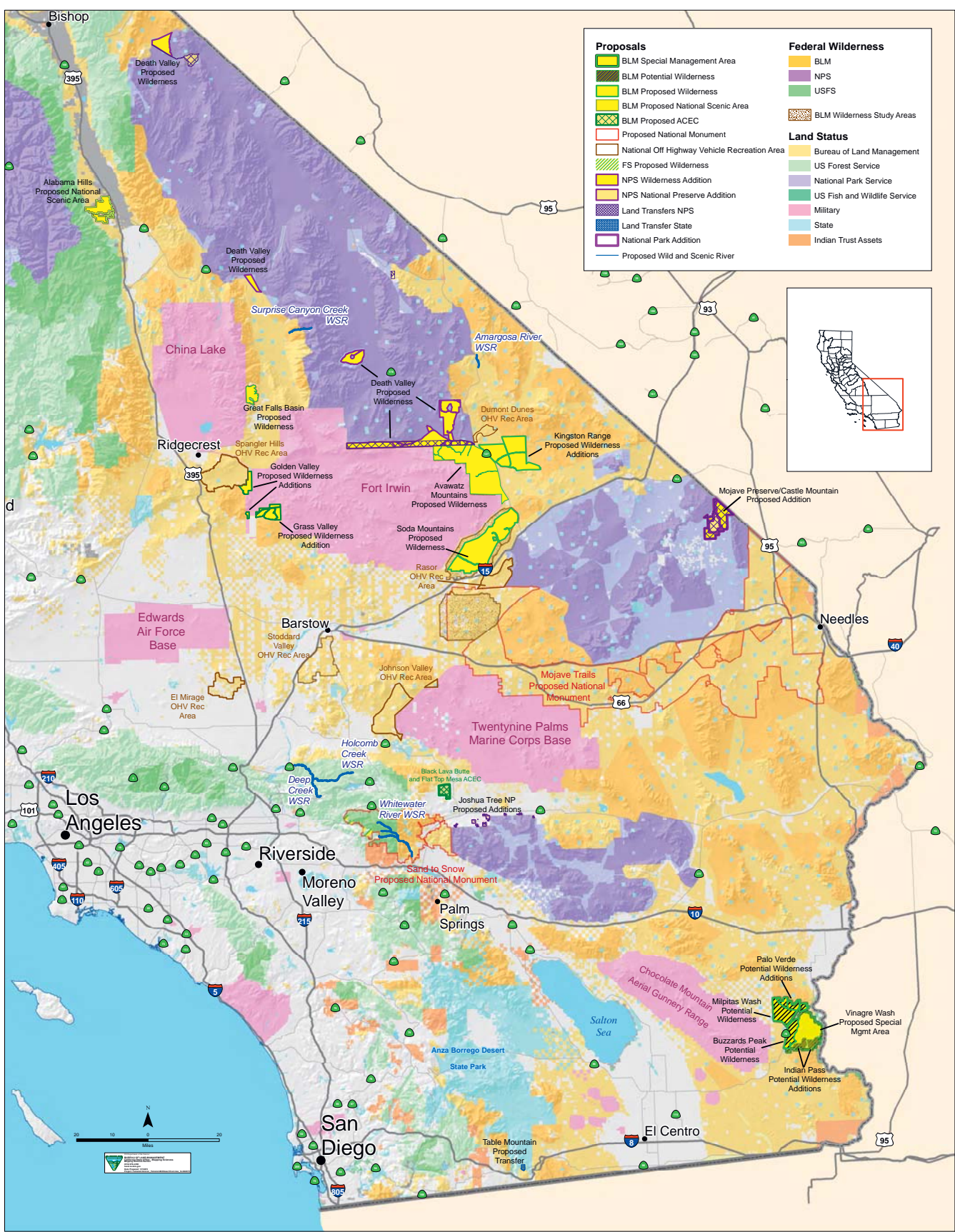
Senator Feinstein was the lead sponsor of the *1994 California Desert Protection Act*, which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on October 31, 1994. It was the largest land conservation designation in the continental United States, protecting more than 9.6 million acres of desert and establishing the Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks and the Mojave National Preserve.

Some of the key provisions in the bill passed in 1994:

- Added 1.3 million acres of land to the existing Death Valley National Monument and redesignated the monument a National Park, with a total of 3.4 million acres.
- Added 234,000 acres of land to the existing Joshua Tree National Monument and redesignated the area a National Park, with a total of 800,000 acres.
- Established a new 1.6 million acre Mojave National Preserve.
- Designated nearly 3.6 million acres of desert administered by the Bureau of Land Management as wilderness.
- Transferred 20,500 acres of BLM land to the state of California to expand the Red Rock Canyon State Park.



OVERVIEW MAP



RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

This bill takes a balanced approach to renewable energy development through several provisions. For example, the bill:

- Gives solar companies displaced by the Mojave Trails National Monument the opportunity to relocate to zones already developed by the federal government; it provides right of first refusal and expedited approval of projects in zones that Department of Interior has already found no conflicts through environmental impact studies.
- Requires the exchange of hundreds of thousands of acres of isolated state parcels currently surrounded by national parks and wilderness, providing the state with lands that could be used for renewable energy, recreation or conservation; and
- Allows for upgrades to transmission lines necessary to bring clean energy from new desert solar and wind farms to urban areas, while still protecting pristine landscapes.

More broadly, by designating the highest priority conservation areas as monuments, wilderness and areas of critical environmental concern, the bill makes clear what areas of the desert solar and wind projects should avoid.



OVERVIEW OF NEW BILL

On February 9, 2015, Senator Feinstein introduced the *California Desert Conservation and Recreation Act* to update and expand upon the historic *California Desert Protection Act of 1994*.

The goal of the new bill is to protect additional land and help manage California's desert resources by carefully balancing conservation, recreation and renewable energy development. It is cosponsored by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.).

The text of the bill is an attempt to achieve consensus on the various uses of the desert land.

Over the past six years, Senator Feinstein has engaged with the full range of stakeholders in the California desert, and her staff held hundreds of hours of meetings with them to develop the text. Stakeholders who helped contribute to the bill include:

- Environmental groups
- Local and state government officials
- Off-highway recreation enthusiasts
- Cattle ranchers
- Mining interests
- Department of Defense
- Wind and solar energy companies
- California's public utility companies
- Native American tribes
- Local residents and businesses
- And many others



New National Monument: Mojave Trails

The cornerstone of the bill is the creation of two new national monuments: the Mojave Trails National Monument and the Sand to Snow National Monument.

Mojave Trails National Monument

This monument would cover approximately **965,000 acres of land** between Joshua Tree National Park and the Mojave Preserve along historic Route 66 in San Bernardino County. This includes approximately 196,000 acres of the former Catellus-owned land, which was donated or purchased by the federal government for conservation purposes.

This land includes iconic sweeping desert vistas, majestic mountain ranges and critical wildlife corridors. The monument would maintain existing recreation uses while also allowing for renewable energy transmission.

The monument would be managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and would also include an advisory committee comprised of representatives of local, state and federal government, conservation and recreation groups and Native American tribes.



Recreation Provisions

The California desert is a popular location for off-road motorists, and this bill takes this into account. The bill intends to give motorists certainty that their use of the desert will be protected in a manner similar to conservation areas.

The bill designates five existing BLM Off-Highway Vehicle areas, covering approximately 142,000 acres of California desert in San Bernardino County, as permanent Off-Highway Vehicle recreation areas.

Land management would remain as it exists today, but BLM would be given increased discretion on managing the areas.



MORE CONSERVATION PROVISIONS

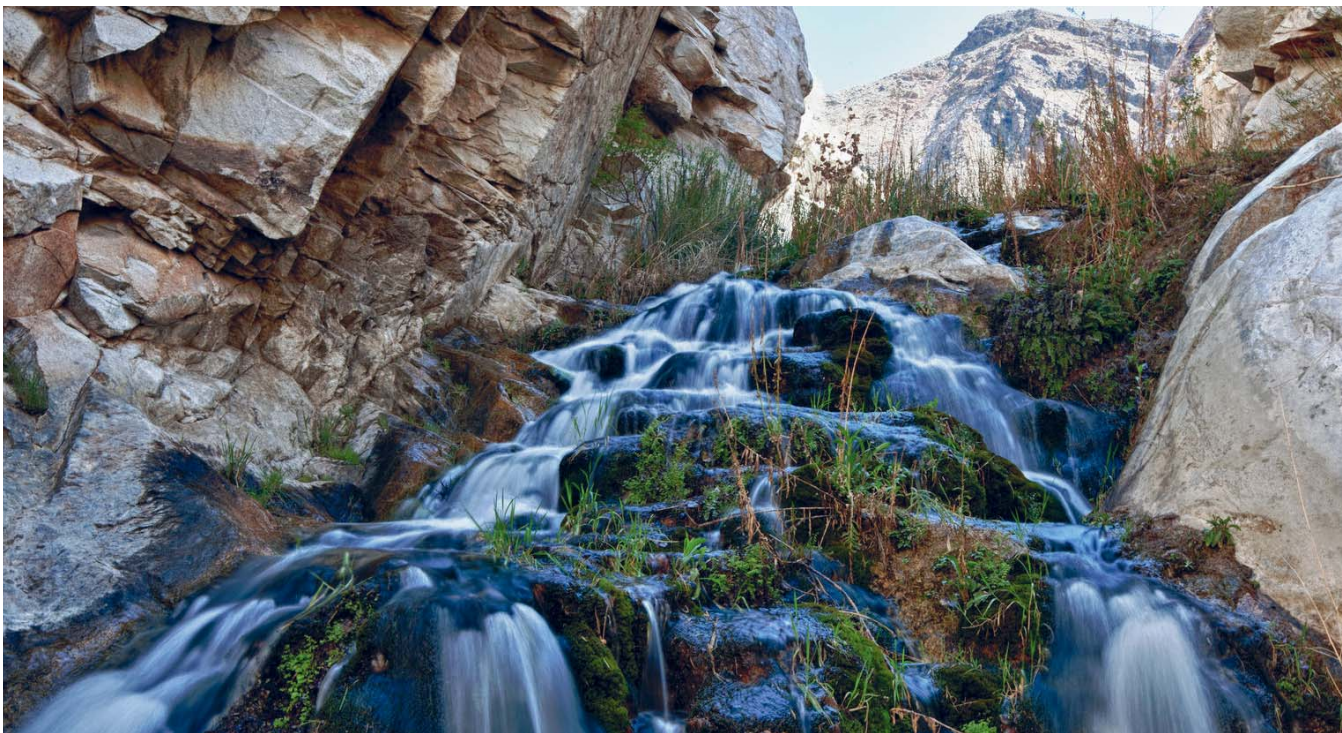
In addition to new monuments, the bill has many conservation provisions, all with the aim of preserving the pristine California desert for generations to come.

The bill would add lands adjacent to the Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks and the Mojave National Preserve:

- 39,000 acres added to Death Valley National Park.
- 22,000 acres added to the Mojave National Preserve.
- 4,500 acres to Joshua Tree National Park.

In terms of other land conservation, the bill would:

- Designate 77 miles of waterways as **Wild and Scenic Rivers**, including Deep Creek and Whitewater River in and near the San Bernardino National Forest and the Amargosa River and Surprise Canyon Creek in and near Death Valley National Park.
- Designate five new **BLM wilderness areas**, covering approximately 250,000 acres of wilderness near Fort Irwin.
- Establish 18,610 acres of the **Alabama Hills National Scenic Area** in Inyo County, protecting the iconic western landscape at the foothills of Mount Whitney.
- Require the Interior Department to take additional steps to protect areas in San Bernardino and Imperial County containing **petroglyphs and other cultural resources**.



NEW NATIONAL MONUMENT: SAND TO SNOW

Sand to Snow National Monument

This monument would encompass **135,000 acres of land** between Joshua Tree National Park and the San Bernardino National Forest, from the desert floor in the Coachella Valley to the top of Mount San Gorgonio.

It would also protect 23.6 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail and the habitat for approximately 240 species of migrating and breeding birds. This area would be the most environmentally diverse national monument in the country, and is one of the most important wildlife corridors in Southern California.



This monument would maintain the existing recreation uses and would be jointly managed by BLM and the Forest Service, with an advisory committee of stakeholders.



STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR THE CALIFORNIA DESERT CONSERVATION AND RECREATION ACT

“The California Desert Conservation and Recreation Act is a great example of how legislation should be crafted and I applaud Senator Feinstein’s efforts in continuing her desert protection legacy.”

- **Monica Argandona, Southern California Wilderness Coalition**

“The conservation of the California desert honors our past and also recognizes the importance of these lands for future generations. The desert includes trails and sacred spaces that are part of Native American heritage. This bill will help protect those important places.”

- **Barbara Durham, Timbisha Shoshone Tribe**

“The California desert lands are important to our community’s quality of life and to our local economy. This legislation will help ensure that this legacy is protected for future generations.”

- **James Ramos, San Bernardino County 3rd District Supervisor**

“The past 20 years have marked an incredible change in the way Americans and international audiences appreciate and recreate in our desert landscapes. Passing this legislation would be a gift with far-reaching benefits for our communities, international visitors, and the wildlife and wild places found only in this region.”

- **Seth Shteir, National Parks Conservation Association**



“I think they’ve done a really wonderful job of crafting a bill right up the middle. There’s something for everybody here.”

- **Randy Banis of Lancaster, a member of off-road groups and the Bureau of Land Management’s Desert Advisory Council**

“Our region’s economy depends on tourism, scientific study and outdoor recreational activities that take place in our unique and beautiful desert, so protecting these lands is an investment in our area’s economic future.”

- **Susan Sorrells, owner and operator of the small tourist town of Shoshone, California**

“Protecting our public lands is an investment in our future. This new bill will make the California desert a destination for tourists throughout the state, nation and the world.”

- **Bob Leone, member of the Yucca Valley Town Council**

“I joined with 21 other retired flag officers, representing 740 years of collective experience in our armed forces, in a letter last month supporting the California Desert Conservation and Recreation Act of 2015... As veterans, we value protected public lands such as national parks, monuments, wilderness areas, and other conservation lands as places for men and women in our armed forces to recuperate, recreate, and reconnect with family and friends after 13 years of continuous overseas combat operations.”

- **Herb Temple, retired U.S. Army lieutenant general and former Chief of the National Guard Bureau**